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Educators and community members talk increasingly of school-community partnerships but have different purposes and arrangements in mind. Educators tend to think of communities in terms of resources for schools, whereas community members tend to see partnerships also as means of influencing their children's education and benefiting the community. This paper examines partnerships from a community perspective. It contrasts school and community views of community. It presents the case of the Southeast Education Task Force, a Baltimore community organization that works to develop partnerships with the school system to improve neighborhood schools. Examples show varying success in forming partnerships concerned with organizing, research, and programming. Analysis highlights the importance of individual principals in forming school-community partnership but shows how common school system structure and culture discourage school-community partnerships. More realistic public expectations of schools would make beneficial partnerships more likely. (Contains 28 references.) (Author/RT)

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THE COMMUNITY APPROACH TO SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

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THE COMMUNITY APPROACH TO SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

ABSTRACT

Educators and community members talk increasingly of school-community partnerships but have different purposes and arrangements in mind. Educators tend to think of communities in terms of resources for schools, whereas community members tend to see partnerships also as means of influencing their children's education and benefitting the community. This paper examines partnerships from a community perspective. It contrasts school and community views of community. It presents the case of the Southeast Education Task Force, a Baltimore community organization that works to develop partnerships with the school system to improve neighborhood schools. Examples show varying success in forming partnerships concerned with organizing, research, and programming. Analysis highlights the importance of individual principals in forming school-community partnership but shows how common school system structure and culture discourage school-community partnerships. More realistic public expectations of schools would make beneficial partnerships more likely.

THE COMMUNITY APPROACH TO SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Educators and community members talk increasingly of school-community partnerships, but they have different arrangements in mind (for example, Booth and Dunn 1996; Cochran and Dean 1991; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, and Ben-Avie 1996; Epstein 2001; Rigsby, Reynolds, and Wang 1995; Ryan, Adams, Gullotta, Weissberg, and Hampton 1995; Stone, Henig, Jones, and Pierannunzi 2001). Educators generally think of partnerships in terms of resources for schools, whereby community members and organizations provide goods, services, or funds to support school activities. Parents, in contrast, think of partnerships in terms of democracy and accountability, whereby parents should have a say in how their children are educated. Community members broadly, including local residents and businesses, think of partnerships in terms of resources for the community, whereby cooperation improves schooling, increases the competence of the local labor force, and makes the community attractive to homebuying families with children.

Research indicates that parent-school partnerships can improve educational outcomes (Henderson and Berla 1994). Some benefits derive instrumentally from specific collaborative activities; others grow from teachers' and parents' pooling knowledge of and authority with children. One might extend that analysis to community-school partnerships by suggesting that institutional and cultural ties between school and community, similarly,.contribute instrumentally and psychologically to children's learning. However, educators and community members not only think of partnerships differently, but also see communities in such different ways that make school-community partnerships problematic.

This paper examines school-community partnerships from a community perspective. The first section contrasts typical educators' and community members' views of communities. The

second section offers a brief case study of the Southeast Education Task Force, a Baltimore community organization that has tried to work with the school system to improve neighborhood schools. The final section draws conclusions regarding and possibilities for building partnerships.

CONTRASTING VIEWS OF COMMUNITIES

Educators' Views of Communities

Joyce Epstein (1995, 2001) has developed a framework that distinguishes different types of partnerships and illustrates how educators tend to think about partnerships. Epstein identifies six types of family and community involvement in children's education that can be grouped in three types of partnerships.[1]

The first are tacit partnerships, in which parents and teachers engage in parallel, complementary activities without contact. Parents or other adults can contribute to children's education by raising them lovingly and consistently, providing a secure home, feeding and clothing them, and attending to their health and development (Epstein's type 1 involvement). These actions prepare students for teachers' efforts at school. In addition, parents can aid children with school work (type 4). In doing so, parents not only help children learn what teachers teach, but show children parents who value learning and know things that matter at school. These partnerships do not depend on any formal agreement between teachers and parents, though discussion can enhance the efforts of both.

In a second type of partnership, individual parents meet, talk, and make formal arrangements with individual staff members. Parents and staff can communicate about school policies and activities, educational goals, assignments, and children's progress. They can discuss

what a child should learn, how teachers and parents can help, and how the child is getting ahead (type 2). In addition, parents can volunteer at school (type 3). Besides helping instrumentally, these actions show teachers and students that parents share responsibility for education.

A third type of partnership actively involves parents and community members in school practices and decision making. Here parents and community members are likely to take roles equal in authority and status to educators'. These are often collective arrangements, where groups or organizations develop relations with schools. Formal agreements may be explicit and elaborate.

One sub-type puts parents in school decision making roles (type 5). They can participate in entities established by schools, from PTA's to advisory committees to site-based management teams. These are variously concerned about policy, personnel, budget, and curriculum. Some school systems have advisory or decision making roles designated for parents. In addition, parents can create organizations to express their concerns, set their own agendas, and advocate for policies or programs at schools or in the system. Thus parents can introduce practices that improve children's learning. In addition, they show their children they care about education and model adults who take leadership. In exercising power, parents may challenge teachers or administrators.

The other sub-type extends beyond parents' roles as parents to their roles as community members and includes other individual and institutional community members, which can give schools goods, services, or money (type 6). These relationships may be purely altruistic, or community partners may get something in return--for themselves, the community, or both. Businesses, churches, or nonprofit organizations can give schools resources and gain customers,

members, or publicity. Service agencies can join with schools to form full-service schools (Dryfoos 1994); while helping schools educate children better, agencies serve more clients. Business staff can mentor school administrators or students and improve the local labor force.

In addition to getting community resources to schools, other relationships of this sub-type give community actors resources for their use or influence over the school. Schools can provide services to community groups, neighborhoods, or institutions, from cleanups to fundraising. Schools can include community members in advisory committees or site management teams. Community members can form organizations to improve schools and invite staff to participate. Regardless of the formal arrangements, opening school boundaries to outsiders creates a potential to change school practices, depending on actors' interests, resources, and relations with the school.

In practice, educators think mainly of the first two types of arrangements as community-school partnerships, consistent with commonly held views of the local community. Many educators simply see the community as an amorphous aggregation of individuals or families. They do not see it as a social system with structure and culture binding individuals and institutions together. Many do not recognize the positive value of community in families' lives. Instead, they see it as having little of value: they regard parents as peripheral to children's education, and they emphasize the problems of low-income families as hindrances to teachers' efforts. Many who take this view do not see ways community members could assist schools or ways schools could support the community--in short, the potential for mutually beneficial partnerships.

Others in school systems see the community as consisting of a few social agencies, businesses, or community organizations, and little else with clear definition. Those who take this

view see the community in terms of discrete institutions from which they might get resources for schools. Though this view differs from the first in recognizing institutions and regarding them as useful partners, it shares the premise of the first that any relationship with the community should be on the schools' terms, to benefit schools.

Some educators hold a third view, envisioning partnerships that benefit schools, parents, and students. However, many taking this view, even when they recognize community organizations as part of the community, nevertheless, think of the community as consisting mainly of families. Thus the school-community partnerships they have in mind most commonly involve schools and individual families, rather than organizations of families or parents or community institutions such as neighborhood associations, umbrella organizations, or community development corporations. In Epstein's framework, for example, collaborating with the community is mentioned last and is sketchily developed. One reason for this image is that many holding this view still think of partnership benefits in terms of children's education as defined by schools. One consequence is that many taking this view do not consider how partnerships could contribute to the development of a community as an entity, as something more than an aggregation of families--in other words, how school-community partnerships could contribute both to improving schooling and to developing a community as a social system.

Community Members' Experience of Community

The communities that people, including educators, belong to are complex, dynamic social systems. For most public schools, the core community membership consists of individuals and organizations located or conducting activity in a geographic school zone. Two characteristics of

communities shape schools' encounters with communities.

First, over the past half century the domains of life--such as family, work, education, and worship--have become increasingly separated, community membership has become increasingly voluntary, and individuals, albeit the middle class more than the poor, have choices about whether to belong to a community and which community--or, more likely, communities--to join. People frequently choose communities on the basis of interests, ranging from intellectual or occupational concerns to those associated with a life style or stage in the life cycle. Whereas in the urban ethnic neighborhood of the past people interacted with the same community members in working, doing business, socializing, raising children, and worshiping, now they are likely to be part of separate communities for different concerns. Some of these communities rest on networks that extend far beyond the neighborhood of residence (Wellman 1999). Community ties vary in force to hold members, and people are relatively free to enter and leave as they choose (Janowitz 1952).

These conditions have consequences for schools' encounters with communities. One is that the local community that is concerned with education is increasingly specialized and detached from other communities of which local residents and institutions are members. The other is that when people consider their interests as the basis for community membership, they are more inclined to think of individual interests than to search for common interests. At the least, it is easy for people to consider themselves members and yet refrain from collective action.

Second, communities, because they are informal social networks, do not act in any deliberate collective way. Though members tacitly and often unconsciously, individually and cumulatively act in ways that promote certain community ideals or interests (Baum 1997), they lack a structure for reasoned thinking and calculated action. Communities form organizations to

act. More accurately, a few people establish or participate in organizations that they say represent the communities of which they are members. Normally, a small minority participate in a community organization, often without widespread knowledge of or authorization of their activities (Cnaan 1991).

Reality, however, is rarely even this simple. Many communities have several organizations--such as a "community organization," a church, a business association, and a political organization--which each do or could claim to represent the community, and people may divide their allegiances. Even so, many people may not feel they are represented by any organization. Further, organizations change. One that has widespread endorsement may lose legitimacy as new leaders replace old and as policies and practices change. Even if an organization stays the same formally, community members' preferences may change, or new members may take the place of departing ones. The relationship between a community organization and a community is fluid.

Still, many communities have no organization. Many others have simple, informal organizations. Even many formal organizations are small. They probably have officers and a letterhead; they may have bylaws, formal membership, and dues; they are less likely to have offices or staff to organize members or run programs. Few communities have both the interest and resources.

These conditions also affect schools' encounters with communities. If no organization takes formal action on behalf of a community, it may seem amorphous and apathetic about education. If an organization speaks on behalf of the community but says nothing about education, then, too, the community may seem apathetic about the topic. If an organization offers

schools help, schools normally can take advantage of the assistance. However, if an organization challenges the schools, or if several organizations take conflicting positions on education, the schools may readily regard the community as foreign, perhaps dangerous territory.

In reality, few school communities are cohesive or active.

The Tenuousness of the School Community

The community of people concerned about a school is specialized, potentially consisting mainly of families whose children attend the school. Moreover, the community is constantly in flux. Most families feel attached to just the school their children are attending at the time. Children normally move from one school to the next. In addition, many families, particularly those with low incomes, move frequently. In many urban schools half the students enter or leave in the middle of the school year. Thus not only do many families have only brief connections to schools, but those who stay have difficulty identifying with a specific, constant group of community members.

The most stable members of an urban school community are likely to be the diminishing group of middle class families, if they send their children to public schools. Their formal education enables them to understand their children's schooling, and their education and social status give them confidence to talk with teachers and administrators. They are most likely to know what goes on at school and to evaluate it in terms of broad education issues. Nevertheless, consistently active parents are exceptional. Few parents, busy working and caring for their children, have time to go to school or participate in an organization on educational issues. Moreover, most feel they lack the knowledge and, hence, authority to speak publicly on their

children's education, and they keep quiet, even when they are concerned. Lower income parents, particularly those who did poorly in school as children, feel insecure with teachers and are easily intimidated by signs that parents are not welcome. Single parents have difficulties finding time or child care to come to school. Parents who speak English poorly have additional problems.

When parents or other community members take active roles in schools, they focus on what they understand best, even if they care more about other things. Thus they may complain about inadequate school buildings rather than students' inability to read because they find it easier to talk about peeling paint, unsafe drinking water, and a lack of play space than curriculum and pedagogy.

Thus individual activism, though itself uncommon, is much more likely than collective action, and schools can get the mistaken impression that communities are amorphous masses that do not care about education.

A CASE OF COMMUNITY INTEREST IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOLS

The Southeast Education Task Force is a Baltimore community organization developed to enable community members to work in partnership with neighborhood schools to improve the schools. Its history illustrates the challenges in connecting communities with schools.

The Setting

Southeast Baltimore was the site of first settlement for the city's immigrants and the center of its industrial development. As late as the 1950's, it was home to vital working class white ethnic communities. Soon after, manufacturers started moving to the suburbs, and families

with resources followed suit. Jobs declined, vacant housing grew, local merchants went out of business, the median household income dropped, and a predominantly white population became increasingly mixed racially (Southeast Planning Council 1993). And school success dropped, as troubled families presented new challenges while providing fewer supports, school funding did not increase commensurately, and teachers and administrators were unequal to complex pedagogical and managerial tasks (Southeast Education Task Force 1999).

In 1991, the South East Community Organization launched a community planning process to revitalize the area. Eighteen months later, 300 people had participated in an effort that produced the *Southeast Community Plan* (Southeast Planning Council 1993). Forty-one recommendations covered economic development, housing, services, and transportation. A generally worded recommendation stated, simply, "Establish a study-action group for schools." Its last-minute insertion reflected both the recognition of the centrality of schools to community life and profound uncertainty about what a community could do to affect schooling.

A faculty member in the University of Maryland's Urban Studies and Planning Program, I had observed the planning process and in 1994 with colleagues and community leaders developed a proposal to the U. S. Department of Education's University Community Service Program for a university-community partnership grant to implement several recommendations. When funding came through in fall, 1994, I joined forces with Sister Bobby English, a community planning leader, activist, one-time teacher, and director of the Julie Community Center, a multi-service center. We started the "study-action group" that became the Southeast Education Task Force. The Task Force would work with the 16 Southeast schools: 11 elementary schools, four middle schools, and a high school.

What follows is a selective history of the Task Force.[2] Highlighted incidents focus on community-school partnerships. They illustrate community interests in forming such partnerships, challenges in engaging the school system, and conditions for success. The examples represent three areas of community activity: organizing, research, and programming.

Organizing

Creating a Community Organization

The first requirement for developing community-school partnerships is creating an organization that can act for community members vis-a-vis schools. Two erroneous assumptions led English and me to believe the task would be easier than it turned out. First, we imagined that our list of PTA and PTO officers and other residents who had spoken about schools at meetings represented a cadre of education activists who would energize a community initiative on schools. Second, we assumed that these people, like the community planning participants, would be prepared to think about goals and strategies for all Southeast Baltimore. In reality, few parents or other community members were active on education, and those who were had interests mainly in the schools their children attended. English started up by calling together activists she knew from other efforts.

The assembled group of ten were mostly middle class, college educated, professional, and white. Only one had children in neighborhood public schools. In contrast, one fourth of the 78,000 Southeast residents in 1990 were functionally illiterate, and median household incomes in 16 of the 26 census tracts were below the modest city median of $24,045, with seven below $20,000. Though 70 per cent of residents were white, 60 per cent of students were African

American. These Task Force members, like many community activists, were an elite group. However, though they were concerned about education, they knew little about the schools. Despite their own education, they were perplexed about what to do.

Hence they used the first year, 1995, to study the schools, as described below, and began to recruit educators and community members for an enlarged task force in the beginning of 1996. However, as the complexities of school reform set in, some of the new participants, along with some from the core group, dropped out. From the beginning, the Task Force had difficulty enlisting parents, for reasons suggested above. They were busy being parents and could not see participation in a task force as a worthwhile investment of time. They cared greatly about education but were unclear how community meetings could improve the schools.

By early 1997, monthly Task Force participation stabilized around 20. Most were middle class and white. Few were parents or school staff, though some of both would become consistent participants later on. Yet parents, teachers, administrators, residents, education experts, and other education activists took part in community meetings, symposia, workshops, projects, and surveys. The thousand participants of the first six years were racially and economically diverse and included significant school and parent representation.

As with all community organizations, the Task Force would face the continual challenge of retaining and recruiting members. Volunteers join organizations for opportunities to act and accomplish something worth while, but the complexity of education called for a lot of research and reflection, which did not suit many activists' tastes. School resistance to collaboration, described below, further limited the possibilities for action, reducing Task Force attractiveness.

Organizing Parents to Work with Schools

In fall, 1996, the Task Force began organizing parents at two schools where principals were interested, to increase parent involvement in the schools. The Task Force continued organizing for five years, eventually working at ten schools. Three examples portray the range of possibilities for these community-school partnerships in which parents take an active role.

The first involves one of the original two schools. The principal already appreciated the benefits active parents could bring and spent considerable time with them. After a year of parent organizing, she accompanied an organizer and some parents to Texas to observe Industrial Areas Foundation organizing with the Alliance Schools (see Shirley 1997 and Warren 2001). The parent organizers helped teachers and parents get to know one another. The organizers trained parents to take active roles in the school's parent-teacher organization. Parents developed their own agenda for school improvements, with priority on creating a library. The organizers helped the school develop a partnership with a neighborhood church, noted below, that assisted with the library, as well as other projects.

A second example, featuring the most concrete organizing accomplishment, involved an elementary school, built without internal classroom walls, where capacity was 474 students and fall, 1996, enrollment was 938. A growing number of low-income African-American students, many from homes without social and psychological structure, were crowded into a school with little physical structure. Ambient noise and visual distractions hindered teaching that was difficult at best. The school asked the Task Force for help.

An organizer began meeting parents and inviting them to PTA meetings to talk about improving conditions. The school system was proposing adjusting zone boundaries to reduce

enrollment by 10 per cent in three years. School staff and parents wanted an addition built. The principal told the organizer she would not lobby actively, to avoid antagonizing the central administration, but urged him to get community support. Over several months, he got parents, elected officials, and school officials to PTA meetings. Finally, at a meeting that 120 attended, the system agreed on an addition. Built in fall, 1997, it had walls and housed 250 students.

This is an example of how a community organization can help parents take an active role lobbying the school system for resources that benefit a neighborhood school. However, once the addition was built, the principal opposed further parent organizing, out of concern that parents would challenge her policies or practices. That action shows how a school administrator may resist a partnership that could benefit students out of anxiety about opposition, criticism, or just loss of control.

A third example provides a more detailed illustration of principal concerns. In fall, 1999, three Task Force organizers were working at six schools. The previous spring, a middle school principal had asked for an organizer at her school. At the end of the semester, she was replaced, and an organizer started up with the new principal in the fall. However, conflict at the school and the organizer's aggressive style led to situations where the organizer was allied with dissident parents and faculty members against the principal. He banned the organizer from the school and complained about the Task Force to the area executive officer.

Another organizer was working at a large elementary school. Though she had a more consensual style, she believed parents could benefit from forming an independent organization to assess school needs and set an agenda for improvement. When she began to create this organization, this principal, too, complained to the area executive officer. She believed the PTO

was adequate for parent participation and, at any rate, did not want a new organization that was not under her control.

After the successes at the first school described above, the principal, complaining about the bureaucratic burdens that system restructuring put on her, retired in spring, 1999. A first-time principal took her place in the fall, and a new organizer started up with her. The principal's uncertainty about what to do, her anxiety about keeping things under control, and the organizer's activist approach (not to mention the principal's absences to attend doctoral classes) led the principal to cancel organizing and talk with the area executive officer.

In early 2000, Task Force leaders met with the area executive officer, the three principals, and the system's public involvement officer to discuss problems and ways of proceeding. Conciliatorily, the Task Force pledged to work with parents only on issues identified by principals, and the area executive officer endorsed this tenet. Organizing continued at the large elementary school but not the other two.

From the school system's perspective, this new principle made sense: school-community partnerships should be formed only on conditions defined by schools as in their interests. Schools needed help, and principals had little time and less patience for addressing issues they considered extraneous to their mission. Conceivably, parents would see their interests as the schools did. And yet some parents disagreed with principals or teachers about various matters, including policies, personnel, budget, decision procedures, and curriculum. The Task Force jeopardized its legitimacy with parents by avoiding issues where parents and schools disagreed. Parents failed to learn about issues they cared about and to gain experience in influencing schools. Staff and parents both lost opportunities to learn to work together, where conflict might be only a small

part of a longer-term, mutually beneficial partnership. When the first step was cut off, none of these possibilities could be explored.

Developing Church-School Partnerships

Early on, Task Force members became interested in church-school partnerships. The churches were important institutions, and, as their parishioners left for the suburbs, they shared schools' interests in community revitalization. In February, 1998, parent organizers brought pastors from four churches to meet staff and parents at an elementary school and explore partnership possibilities. With little introduction, the principal, teachers, and parents delivered a long list of what they needed that churches might get them: recreation space, a library, an auditorium, a cafeteria, books. And there were problems the churches might help with, such as dysfunctional families and long distances students had to travel to school. Eventually a minister asked on what basis the school expected to develop partnerships. His church had limited resources and got many requests for help. What would the church get from the school? No one offered an answer.

Eventually, one of the churches developed a partnership with the school. The church offered space for school events, provided dinner for graduation, and helped collect books for a library. The pastor began to think about developing an after-school program; for tutoring she wanted to use religious materials developed by her denomination. The after-school program has not yet been implemented, but this minister, too, made clear that her institution would develop a partnership with a school only if benefits were reciprocal. The church would provide resources for the school's educational mission but wanted participants for its religious programs. This

particular example raises legal and policy issues about relations between public education and religion, but the practical matter about school-community partnerships is general: schools are more likely to develop partnerships that benefit them when they benefit their partners, too.

Research

Community organizations are expected to organize, but they are unlikely to engage in research. Members' desires to *do something* and funders' overwhelming preferences for programs over research both push toward action, away from systematic knowledge development or use. Thus few grass-roots organizations have the capacity--volunteers or, more likely, staff with expertise and time--to conduct research and design interventions from the findings. These organizations risk spending their scarce resources on inefficacious action.

Exceptionally, the Southeast Education Task Force gave considerable attention to research. An important reason was its partnership with the University of Maryland's Urban Studies and Planning Program, which provided research expertise. Still, that partnership reflected Task Force leaders' interests in basing action on knowledge. Three examples here illustrate attempts to conduct research in partnership with the school system.

During its first year, the Task Force initiated two research efforts. One involved interviewing the principals and opportunistic samples of three teachers, parents, and students at each of the 16 Southeast schools, to see what these parties identified as the schools' assets and needs. A half dozen volunteers conducted the interviews. Though the study was hardly rigorous science, it provided a coherent overview of the schools, identified assets and needs at individual schools, and helped formulate an agenda of four common issues: improving programs, increasing

safety, building community-school partnerships, and increasing resources. Educators, parents, and other community members endorsed the findings at a meeting in November, 1995. Thus the research, assuming a potential community-school partnership, helped start building a partnership.

At the same time, the Task Force began a companion research project, to analyze the school system's data on Southeast students. In February, 1995, Task Force leaders met with the Baltimore City Public Schools Superintendent Walter Amprey to introduce the Task Force and ask for data. The superintendent welcomed the community effort (though he did say he favored centralizing power before correcting himself and saying he meant decentralizing power), and he agreed to provide the data. I met with an analyst from the system, who helped identify useful available data. After 18 months, the system had provided only two thirds of the requested data.

Several factors help explain this failure at school-community partnership. First, the central administration was in chaos, as the system was under attack for poor student achievement and was tied up in state and federal litigation over special education, funding adequacy, and weak management (see Baum 1999; Orr 1999). Amprey, under siege, in any case, was not noted for follow-through. Realistically, a community organization's data request was not a high priority for the system.

Still, the superintendent's authorization for the data had gone to the system's research department, and an analyst was prepared to deliver the data. However, the analyst's supervisor was feuding with the analyst and, despite continual pledges to provide the data, dragged his heels, apparently to make the case to his superiors that he needed additional staff. The supervisor eventually blocked the analyst's access to the database, and the analyst moved to another position. Bureaucratic chicanery consumed months.

A city councilman and a contractor both met with the superintendent to make the case for the data, without success. I talked again with Amprey, who again offered to help, but nothing happened. Eventually, on the suggestion of a university colleague working on an unrelated project with the school system, I contacted an assistant superintendent with no connection to Task Force work in the hope of getting help securing the data. He said he would see what he could do. A week later, he called back, to say that someone who could not be identified had produced some data on a weekend and that I could find a tape with the data in an unmarked envelope in the drawer of a desk in an unused office. It was there, and the Task Force proceeded to analyze the data that had been provided.

Chaos, incompetence, chicanery, and a paranoid culture, as well as, perhaps, simple resistance to community involvement, all operated against developing a school-community partnership whereby a community organization, which wanted to assist neighborhood schools and which was going to do something, could benefit from the system's knowledge of students and design interventions on the basis of that knowledge. In fact, Task Force efforts to analyze the data would supplement the work of the system's research department, which routinely collected data but analyzed little and, in any case, did not look at students in terms of communities.

A third episode involved Task Force efforts to conduct research on school facilities in order to participate in the system's comprehensive rezoning process. Litigation over special education, funding, and management was resolved in 1997 through a negotiated state-driven restructuring of the Baltimore City Public School System. The superintendency was replaced by a chief executive officer, a chief academic officer, and a chief financial officer. The school board was replaced by one jointly appointed by the mayor and governor. In return for additional state

funding, the new board was required to develop a master plan.

One of the board's first actions was to engage engineering consultants to assess the condition of the city's 183 school buildings. The study, completed in March, 1998, estimated the cost of bringing buildings up to standards at $606,000,000. The staggering price encouraged the board to launch a comprehensive rezoning initiative, measuring the buildings' capacities against space standards and comparing capacities to changes in enrollments over the decade. Redrawing zones and closing schools, as well as building new schools, would be on the agenda.

In fall, 1999, the Task Force sought the consultants' assessments of Southeast schools, along with proposed space standards, to determine what improvements the schools needed, whether space was adequate, and how reconfiguration of zones or grades, as well as new construction, could resolve problems with overcrowding in half the elementary schools. Several of the schools were quite old, with problems including classrooms without walls, unreliable or no air conditioning, improvised classrooms in stairwells or closets, and no library, cafeteria, or recreation space. The Task Force planned two initiatives. One was a report to the school board on short-term needs for repairs and renovations in Southeast schools. The other was a long-term community plan on school facilities in Southeast Baltimore.

The school system's facilities planning and school construction office gave the Task Force a copy of the consultants' summary report, but, despite repeated promises of detailed information on individual schools, never delivered that information. The instructional services division provided a copy of the space standards. With this information in hand, Task Force members went to Southeast principals, to ask whether the assessment of their facility conditions was accurate and whether the school had the space called for in the standards, to determine what the Task

Force should advocate for on behalf of the schools. Few principals had seen either document.

Eight principals met with someone from the Task Force, gave a tour of the facilities, and provided an assessment of school needs. Two others told the caller to get answers from someone in the area office or central office, and a couple said the request was an inappropriate community intrusion into school business. From the information provided by the eight principals, in June, 2000, the Task Force gave the school board a report on short-term repair and renovation needs, and a commissioner subsequently met with Task Force members, parent organizers, and representatives of two schools to address their needs.

During the fall of 2000, the Task Force began drafting a long-range capital improvements plan for Southeast schools and convened community meetings to comment. Participants included the schools' chief executive officer, chief academic officer, other staff, and commissioners, principals, the state facilities officer, elected officials, community organization directors, funders, and pastors, in addition to parents and other community members. The plan was published in December and formally presented to chief executive officer Carmen Russo in February, 2001. A proposal to build a new K-8 school was consistent with the system's own plans for Southeast, Russo asked for help in getting state approval, and the Task Force joined the system in protracted lobbying with the Inter-Agency Committee on School Construction, which has remained unconvinced about the need for additional space or, in any case, new construction as an alternative to renovation of a vacant building. The CEO was skeptical and noncommittal about the Task Force proposal for extensive reconfiguration of elementary and middle schools into K-8 schools, though she later proposed 17 K-8 conversions elsewhere in the city.

In this final episode, the Task Force tried to build two types of partnerships, one with

principals and the other with central system management and the board. Some principals cooperated with the Task Force because they believed they could benefit from doing so. Some central staff provided requested information, the board responded to a request for action, and the CEO gave the Task Force plan a hearing, with a request for support on an item of common interest. Although the Task Force was interested in developing long-term partnerships, these relationships are more accurately characterized as opportunistic cooperation on the part of the school system.

Part of the explanation for schools' reticence is simply lack of time for a community partnership, with uncertainty about the return on such an investment. Similarly, the central administration gets many requests from community organizations, for everything from information to ongoing collaboration, and it does not have time for all. Still, in this case some staff resisted requests even for readily available information, and some avoided low-cost encounters that could have benefited them. Many professional educators are more comfortable addressing students or administrators than working with communities (Levin and Riffel 2000). However, some staff and officials seem to have resisted active community involvement in education because they do not believe in it and regard it as a threat to their authority (see Baum 2002).

Programming

Programming combines research, in planning what to do, with organizing, in getting people act so as to implement the plan. Many community organizations concentrate on organizing. Few have the capacity to plan programs, much less implement them. By definition, most that do are larger organizations, with staff and budget. Some community organizations

avoid programming for political reasons: they believe assuming responsibility for managing programs not only competes for resources with organizing, but also creates interests that make it difficult to maintain an open, critical stance.

The Task Force got into programming incidentally and opportunistically. Members wanted to take action and occasionally initiated a project on their own. For example, in spring, 1997, a social worker and a fifth grade teacher, both on the Task Force, created a program whereby adults came to fifth grade classes at the teacher's school, talked about their jobs and the work world, and read with children. Later, the social worker got the nearby high school to send students to tutor the elementary school children in reading. This volunteer program lasted 18 months, until a high school personnel change let responsibility for tutoring lapse.

A more deliberate effort to develop a community-school partnership concerned with programming involved an initiative, starting in early 1998, to help an elementary school become a full-service, community school. Task Force members had been looking for ways to influence children's learning more than through organizing, and studies of community and service interventions that supported academic work drew their interest. The Task Force sponsored a symposium on "Community Schools and Partnerships" to try to interest a principal or two in developing a community school in partnership with the Task Force.

An elementary school principal attending said she wanted to try, as did another who could not attend, the principal, noted earlier, who worked actively with parents. The Task Force unsuccessfully sought funding for planning processes to develop full-service, community schools at the two sites. In 1999, the Task Force proceeded expediently and incrementally, imagining what a planning process might have recommended and seeking funding for one of the elements.

The Task Force got a grant for GED training for parents at the two schools. By the time funding came through, however, the principal active with parents had retired, and the neophyte who took her place accepted the GED program only after much hesitation and said she could not commit herself to anything more. The Task Force concentrated on the other elementary school.

The school's principal was an entrepreneur, who had already drawn in some social, health, and cultural programs. Bobby English, in her dual role as Task Force chair and Julie Center director, took the lead. She served on the school's school improvement team. She relocated a staff member from the Julie Center to the school to engage in health promotion and provide emergency assistance. She got a public health nurse who worked at the Julie Center to arrange for student nurses to do family health assessments at the school. She directed some Notre Dame AmeriCorps tutors to the school. Then the Task Force got the GED grant and a grant for a coordinator for a new Family and Community Resource Center, which became the hub for service and community activities at the school. The Task Force arranged with a local health care provider to provide school-based health care and give health education related to problems of children with substance-abusing parents. The center organized a drug abuse prevention program and other activities. The Julie Center has continued to help the Resource Center get resources, in the hope that it can become self sustaining.

This community-school partnership has been successful for straightforward reasons. The Task Force and the Julie Center provided money and human resources for programs in the school. The community organizations asked nothing in return. The social and health programs, while supporting academic efforts, did not touch the school's curriculum and pedagogy.

CONCLUSIONS: PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Lessons

This paper has examined Southeast Education Task Force efforts to promote two types of active parent and community partnership with schools. Parent organizing was the primary instrument for increasing parent involvement in school decision making. Church-school partnership development, research, and programming encouraged school collaborations with community entities.

Partnerships can take three forms. In *altruism*, one party gives something to another without expectation of getting anything back other than the satisfaction of helping or a general hope for improvement as a result. For example, a community organization may recruit volunteers for school tutoring. In *exchange*, each party gives the other something that serves its interests. For example, a firm may give a school in return for publicity, in the hope of increasing business. In *mutualism*, parties find new, shared interests and collaborate to serve them. For example, a church and school may discover common interests in developing a vacant lot into park and recreation space for students, their families, parishioners, and other residents (see Baum 2000). .

The Task Force examples represent mainly altruism, whereby community organizations unilaterally gave resources to schools. Only churches raised questions about getting something in exchange. Neither the Task Force nor the Julie Center asked for anything back. The churches' position reflects their institutional needs, particularly their interest in shoring up their congregations. The Task Force and Julie Center altruism represents a normal stance of community organizations.[3] At the same time, it is noteworthy that, as the encounter between the elementary school and the churches illustrated, schools thought of themselves mainly as needy,

and they rarely considered what they could do for community institutions. School staff normally saw "the community" as a potential pool of resources, rather than as individuals and institutions in a social system of which schools were part and to which they might contribute.

To be accurate, one loosely organized entity did ask something from schools in exchange for support: parents. At many schools, besides those described here, parents wanted formal and informal authority. They wanted to be heard, and they wanted to influence school policies and practices, specifically or in general. Most staff who lamented low parent involvement and urged more had in mind the first two types of partnership described earlier: tacit, parallel partnerships where parents took responsibility at home, and communication with and volunteering at school. Few wanted to include parents in decisions. Thus most educators found what parents wanted in exchange to be unthinkable; in a sense, educators could not hear the request and thus did not have to respond to it. In this context, school staff who recognized parents as part of "the community" were much more likely to see them as problems, in failing to prepare children for school, than as resources, much less persons with authority.

Nevertheless, though these partnerships were altruistic, they were not without costs to schools. On one occasion, the Task Force offered a school a consultation on student discipline by university faculty, to be paid for by a grant, and the principal turned it down, explaining that it was not free, because it would require staff time and attention, with opportunity costs in terms of current programs. Principals often ignored Task Force partnership proposals out of concern about such costs. At the same time, what distinguished the principals at the schools where parent organizing first took off and where the full-service community school developed was their ability to look past immediate costs to potential benefits.

The neophyte principal who nearly turned down a GED program and the principal of the overcrowded school who declined to advocate with the central administration for an addition highlight an additional challenge to forming even altruistic school-community partnerships. Both avoided taking initiatives not explicitly authorized by the system. Though the latter case included the possibility of conflict, the former, which was representative of many Task Force experiences, did not: the principal focused on satisfying central office directives and regarded other activities as unimportant, unauthorized, risky, forbidden, or all four. New principals were especially reluctant to connect with a community organization, since they were often uncertain how to do their job as well as unfamiliar with their school. Because, like most principals, they knew little about communities in general, they had no framework for understanding or trusting the organizations that came to them. On top of this, principal turnover was high in the city, with one fourth to one third of Southeast principals changing yearly, so that community organizations continually encountered inexperienced principals moving cautiously.

Schools' readiness for community partnerships depends on principals. The principal who embraced parent organizing and the other who wanted a full-service school illustrate the exceptional conditions that make schools receptive. They could see the potential benefits because they could see beyond immediate, formal system directives. They recognized that they had discretion regarding school directions and programs, and they did not hesitate to exercise authority: The latter was a veteran of many years, whereas the former, though senior in the system, was a new principal when she started at her school, a year before the parent organizer arrived. In fact, she warmed to parent organizing after seeing it for a year. Thus job security matters, but so, too, does personality, including the ability to visualize possibilities and the

willingness to take chances and exercise authority.

At the same time, for a community organization to establish even an altruistic partnership, it must have something that schools want. For its first two years, the Task Force had little of use to schools. Though it had a growing understanding of parent and community interests in neighborhood schools, neither principals nor the central administration cared about this local knowledge. One principal bluntly said that the only thing of value the Task Force could give him was a check. Gradually, the Task Force developed three types of resources that principals found useful. One was expertise and time, some voluntary, some paid for by grants, as with the tutoring program started by the social worker and teacher and parent organizing. A second was money, in grants secured by the Task Force for school activities, as with the full-service community school. A third was relationships, networks, and social capital. Organizing to get the addition built and working with the school board to get repairs at two schools are examples. In other instances, the Task Force linked school staff to university faculty, the state and federal departments of education, the Empowerment Zone, and national education experts.

In all these respects, community organizations can accomplish a great deal for and with schools simply by carrying out activities for which schools have no time. Arranging meetings, for example, is invaluable. In addition, community organizations can enable activities by absorbing or reducing a school's risks of acting. It can introduce schools to potential partners, such as churches, and hold the partners' hands as they get started. It can bring in political allies or experts who, in different ways, can increase the likelihood of success or diminish the costs of failure.

Possibilities

What might increase the likelihood of school-community partnerships in which parents and community members take active roles, and, in particular, what might make exchange and mutualism possible? Much of the burden falls on the school side, because how the system acts toward community members, in terms of both imparting substantive knowledge and inviting participation, strongly influences community involvement (Epstein 2001). In this case, an elite group of highly motivated, largely college-educated community activists floundered for two years, unable to figure out what they could contribute to school reform, unable to connect solidly with the system. Lower income, less formally educated parents face much greater challenges.

Many requisite changes in school systems are just that: systemic. The difficulty many principals have in forming relations with parent or community groups is not just a matter of their personality. Urban school systems constantly seek new principals and rotate their stock to find workable matches with schools. Most whom they recruit are promoted from teaching, where neither their experience, formal training, nor focus on individual students has prepared them for leading and managing in a complex institution. Thus many principals are insecure in their positions for a combination of reasons.

In part, rotation of principals reflects a broader systemic condition: school systems are centrally organized to respond to public demands and opportunities (Meyer 1977; Meyer and Rowan 1983; Meyer, Scott, and Strang 1994). Principals are caught in a role conflict, between being educational leaders for teachers and managers for the system. The central administration puts primacy on responding to public pressures, keeping principals in line through bureaucratic directives, bolstered by incentives, threats, and a culture of anxiety about control. Many principals' lack of preparation for their dual role makes it still harder and time consuming for

them, increasing the likelihood they will fail and be moved. Few have time or space for considering community partnerships, much less engaging in them.

Active community involvement is not a priority for most school systems. Much of the explanation is educators' professional belief they have a monopoly on the knowledge needed to teach children. A growing factor is public skepticism about that view and political insistence on "accountability" for "results." Under siege, schools draw in the wagons and avoid contacts with the public, including community organizations (Baum 2002). Under these conditions central administrators and principals neither share information about education and school policies with parents nor invite them into partnerships. Community members feel they do not know enough to act and cannot find openings to help. Changes in school system culture, structure, and incentives would increase the likelihood of school-community partnerships.

On the community side, initiatives to develop active partnerships with schools require motivation, confident knowledge, and an organizational capacity. The Task Force's existence and activities depended in great measure on outside funding, beginning with a substantial U. S. Department of Education grant to the University of Maryland, followed by several foundation gifts. The money not only paid for staff, but secured time, for community members to form an organization, develop knowledge, connect to schools and the school system, and initiate projects. Though, ideally, these are normal community activities, organizing is always difficult, and maintaining an organization is an ongoing challenge. The complexities of education make community activism harder in this field than most others.

Thus it is difficult for community members to create the capacity to initiate partnerships with schools. Further, it is hard for community organizations to stay in existence long enough, to

sustain relations with schools, to see projects through and continue to build a partnership, particularly when principals and other administrators keep changing, but also when parents come and go as their children move through the schools. Leadership and vision are essential to motivate and guide community organization. Money, too, is crucial for organizing, conducting research, and programming to create and further partnerships.

Educators have put themselves in a bind. As professionals, they have claimed an exclusive role in children's education. They have equated education with schooling. However, public expectations of education have grown more numerous, complex, ambiguous, inconsistent, and unrealistic. Neither schools nor any other single institution can satisfy these expectations. Only more realistic public discussion of education, influences on children's success, and conditions that increase the probabilities of this success can relieve schools of some of their unnecessary, though chosen, burden and reallocate responsibility more reasonably. Children's education depends on "the community," from actions of parents and local residents and organizations to the operations of such larger institutions as the housing market, the labor market, the economy, the health care system, race relations, and the national political culture.

No local school system can be expected to reform all those institutions, but neither should any be expected to do everything to educate children. School systems should be expected, however, to do what they can to improve children's possibilities. Partnerships with communities are a component. If local schools and community members could realistically assess opportunities for aiding children, they would form more active partnerships. Not only would they find success in altruistic relations, but they would consider exchanges and explore mutual interests. There is no single Archimedean lever on education; there are myriad smaller, but real, opportunities.

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NOTES

1. Epstein simply lists the six types of involvement without categorizing them further.
2. Detailed accounts can be found in Baum (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, and in progress).
3. Two other organizations contributed parent organizers to the Task Force efforts--the Citizens Planning and Housing Organization and the South East Community Organization. They, similarly, gave without expectation of anything other than recognition.

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